

doing just as she had done. They were to set aside categories that clearly worked together and make a separate stack of cards that simply didn't fit in or had too little information. This latter stack would serve as the basis for another trip to the school's media center.

Once the note cards were in good order and additional information had been gathered, Barbara assisted each student in writing a thesis statement. She emphasized that this statement contained the heart of their reports and that everything they wrote needed to either fulfill or justify this statement.

When the students had thesis statements, they began their outlines, which organized their note cards into a beginning, middle, and end. Her students helped each other with the partner that had categorized their cards, since each was very familiar with the other's information. Barbara emphasized that research writing is a process that must be well thought out, and as a result, the students began to better understand the critical importance of careful planning. She also showed them how to keep a careful record of what information came from which source, so that they could create an accurate reference list later in the final documentation stage of their reports.

Once the outline was completed, the students began to write their opening paragraphs. Barbara told them to make certain that the thesis statement appeared somewhere in this first paragraph. After both Barbara and the pairs reviewed each other's introductions, they were ready to begin their first full drafts. She then asked her students to use about four days of homework time to complete these.

The day the rough drafts were due, students exchanged their papers with their original partners and peer edited each other's writing. Barbara gave her students a check sheet to guide their editing, including basic conferencing questions and the proofreading symbols they were to use. She also read the papers herself, offering suggestions for improvement. Students revised their drafts according to their peer's and Barbara's input, and they took their drafts to their science teacher for a verification of content and focus. Barbara then showed the students how to document their resources, both within the body of the paper and in bibliography.

The students were, at last, ready to create their finished products in the computer lab. They worked hard and were pleased with their efforts! Students were given time in science to formally present their research.

Making the Connection

Students became familiar and comfortable with the research process. Not only did their high school require a senior exit project as a prerequisite for graduation, but Barbara also knew that her school was considering an 8th grade mini exit project. The skills her students were learning would be valuable now and in the immediate future.

She made a serious effort to connect the word research to life events, like buying a new bicycle or deciding on a new pet. She emphasized that research can be both formal, as in their class papers, and informal, as in gathering personal information to be used in an upcoming decision. Either way, students and adults alike need to understand its value as a life skill.